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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 4744
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2044
RUEHKU/AMEMBASSY KUWAIT 0423
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1597
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3675
RUEHSI/AMEMBASSY TBILISI 0031
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 1556
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2349
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 2433
RUEHPT/AMCONSUL PERTH 0575
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 JAKARTA 000372

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SUBJECT: CODEL PRICE WORKS TO STRENGTHEN INDONESIAN
DEMOCRACY

REF: JAKARTA 218

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¶1. (U) This message was coordinated with Consulate Medan.

¶2. (U) SUMMARY: From February 17-21, CODEL Price visited Indonesia as part of the legislative strengthening program of the House Democracy Assistance Commission (HDAC). CODEL Price toured Aceh, met with President Yudhoyono, and held meetings with top legislators from the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR). U.S. Representatives on the trip consistently stressed the importance of legislative autonomy, accountability, and constituent outreach. Chair Price and DPR Speaker Laksono signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) formalizing the HDAC-DPR relationship. In meetings with key interlocutors and during a press event, CODEL Price also urged the GOI to work to convince the Burmese regime to reform. END SUMMARY.

USG ASSISTANCE TO ACEH

¶3. (U) During a February 17-18 visit to Banda Aceh, CODEL Price witnessed first hand the remarkable role U.S. assistance has played in helping Aceh recover from roughly 30 years of violent conflict, as well as the devastating tsunami of December 2004. After visiting a memorial site to pay respects to the tens of thousands who perished in the tsunami, the delegation inspected one portion of the West

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Coast Highway construction site, where USAID is re-building a vital 96-mile transport corridor. CODEL Price also toured a progressive Islamic school supported by U.S. funding. (Note: The CODEL consisted of U.S. Representatives David Price, D-NC, John Boozman, R-AR, Sam Farr, D-CA, Mazie Hirono, D-HI, Michael Conaway, R-TX, and Jim McDermott, D-WA.)

¶4. (U) During February 18 meetings with Aceh Governor Irwandi and local legislators from the provincial parliament

(DPRD), CODEL Price and interlocutors discussed the ongoing challenges facing Aceh, while taking stock of the tremendous reforms already underway. CODEL Price underscored to Governor Irwandi and the DPRD the USG's long-term commitment to rehabilitation and peace building in Aceh, and praised Aceh's firm embrace of democracy.

WITH YUDHOYONO: BURMA, AVIAN FLU

15. (U) During a February 19 meeting with President Yudhoyono, CODEL Price congratulated Indonesia on its success in hosting the historic COP-13 climate change conference, registered concerns about the alarming spread of the avian influenza epidemic, and pushed for a more forceful Indonesian role in Burma. Members of the delegation expressed their admiration for the speed and scope of Indonesia's democratic transformation and noted that Indonesia had become a model for the region. Chairman Price explained HDAC's legislative strengthening mandate and history of collaboration with the DPR, before urging the President to support greater legislative independence.

16. (U) President Yudhoyono thanked the group for its work with the DPR and emphasized that democracy had reached the point of no return in Indonesia. In response to a question from Representative McDermott about Indonesia's avian influenza sample sharing policy, SBY underscored that the GOI's policy was one of partnership, fairness and cooperation. The President emphasized that Indonesia sought to solve the avian influenza problem, and had issued open invitations to the United States and the World Health Organization to work in tandem with the GOI towards this goal.

17. (U) With respect to the GOI's Burma policy, SBY acknowledged CODEL Price's concerns and pointed to Burma's plans for a 2010 election as a potential sign of progress.

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SBY emphasized that Burmese Senior General Than Shwe was afraid of quick change and opined that sanctions would not work with the regime. Yudhoyono added that as a fellow member of ASEAN he could not endorse punitive measures that would seek to isolate the regime, and he expressed hope that through engagement and working with its ASEAN partners the GOI could help push Burma in the right direction. As a measure of his personal activism on the issues, SBY noted that he had met with UN Special Envoy Ibrahim Gambari earlier in the morning (septel reviews S/E Gambari's Feb. 22 meeting with the Ambassador). Yudhoyono also told CODEL Price that he communicated directly with Than Shwe with some frequency. In his conversations with Than Shwe, SBY sought to convince him that democracy represented the best hope for Burma's future.

SIGNING A BENCHMARK MOU

18. (U) On February 19, CODEL Price met with Speaker Laksono, Commission I Chair Theo Sambuaga--the DPR's Foreign Affairs and Defense Commission--and other senior parliamentarians. Laksono welcomed the CODEL to Indonesia, spoke about his own efforts at legislative reform, and agreed with the CODEL's assessment that a stronger legislature would help expedite the democratic consolidation process in Indonesia. Chairman Price noted that HDAC hoped to continue to develop the friendship between the DPR and the U.S. and described the partnership between the two institutions as one of HDAC's most successful relationships. Chairman Price also emphasized HDAC's belief that if the DPR wanted to be fully independent of the executive, it would need to take control of its own budget and bolster the number of expert staff available to help Indonesian legislators conduct the nation's business. He further stressed that the DPR's staffing structure, currently under Executive Branch oversight, should be reformed to develop a staff cadre that would report directly to the Legislative Branch.

¶9. (U) Speaker Laksono and Chairman Price closed the meeting by signing an MOU between HDAC and the DPR. (Note: Mission will forward the document to EAP/MTS.) The MOU formalizes assistance between the two institutions by encouraging periodic staff and member exchanges, technical assistance, and continued cooperation. The MOU is the first such agreement that the DPR has ever signed with another legislature. The signing ceremony was well attended by the local media and received positive press coverage throughout Indonesia.

CODEL PRICE ENGAGES WITH THE DPR

¶10. (U) The six Representatives and six staffers in CODEL Price participated in an intense series of meetings at the DPR that stretched out over the better part of two days. The representatives met at one point or another with the Speaker, the DPR Reform Implementation Team, the Legislative Council, the DPR House Affairs Committee, the DPR Budget Committee, Commission I, legislators from all ten party factions, the U.S. Indonesia Caucus, the Inter-Parliamentary Caucus, the Myanmar Caucus, and USAID's legislative strengthening partners.

¶11. (U) CODEL Price staffers participated in many of the same meetings and also engaged in a staff specific program with members from the Speaker's office and expert staff from the Legislative Council. Library of Congress staffers held three training workshops, including two large sessions for over 40 DPR research staff members on the issues of accountability, constituent outreach, legislative autonomy and impartiality in providing assistance to members. One measure of the intensity of the program was the fact that at several points during the visit, the Representatives and staffers participated in three concurrent meetings at the DPR.

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¶12. (U) In meetings with the DPR's Budget Committee, Legislative Council and its Reform Implementation Team, Indonesian parliamentarians consistently highlighted the issue of budget autonomy as the DPR's most pressing concern. A number of DPR members explained the budget process in Indonesia and noted that until the DPR controls its own financial fate, its scope and authority would remain limited.

¶13. (U) Representative McDermott captured the essence of the importance of budget autonomy when he noted that: "he who has the gold rules." Chairman Price explained that HDAC sought to assist other legislatures by way of example and through the exchange of information and experiences. Several members of CODEL Price conceded that even with the benefit of over two hundred years of experience, the United States Congress was also still a work in progress. In a meeting with the House Affairs Committee, Congressman Conaway underscored the importance of accountability in a professional legislature and stressed the distinction between representing one's party versus representing one's constituents.

PRESSING THE GOI ON BURMA

¶14. (U) CODEL Price raised the issue of Burma at every possible turn, urging President Yudhoyono and DPR Speaker Laksono to leverage Indonesia's access to the regime to effect change. During a reception at the Ambassador's residence that included several members of the DPR's Myanmar Caucus, CODEL Price lauded the Caucus' role in raising the visibility of the Burma issue in Indonesia and urged the Caucus to continue to press the GOI to play a more active role on the issue.

¶15. (U) In a lunch with Commission I, responsible for foreign affairs and defense, Chairman Price praised members of the Commission for using the ratification process of the

ASEAN Charter to press the regime to undertake needed reforms. Price also emphasized the need for civilian oversight of defense. Djoko Susilo, a member of Commission I and also the Myanmar Caucus Chair, emphasized that the ASEAN Charter was central to the Caucus' Burma engagement strategy.

Finally, in a February 20 press conference, Chairman Price used his opening statement to call for an immediate end to human rights abuses in Burma. Price told the media that the delegation had raised the issue throughout their visit.

¶16. (U) CODEL Price reviewed and cleared this message.

HUME